

heading "NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMS, OPERATING EXPENSES" is hereby reduced by \$20,000,000.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to yield myself 5 minutes to speak to the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized.

Mr. THUNE. I rise to offer an amendment on behalf of America's veterans. My amendment provides an additional \$20 million for veterans health care, offset by striking \$20 million appropriated under this supplemental for the AmeriCorps Program.

Among other things, my amendment provides more funding for the implementation of the provisions of the 2004 CARES Act, or capital asset realignment for enhanced services decision, submitted by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for enhanced VA service, as well as other actions designed to help the VA provide better and more accessible care to our Nation's veterans.

As we seek to restrain spending, we must carefully scrutinize our priorities. Our veterans must take priority over programs and some of the other priorities we are trying to address in the budget. My amendment does this with AmeriCorps. We must do everything we can in a fiscally responsible way to ensure our veterans receive the health care they require.

While we provide a generous funding of over \$30 billion for VA health care for the current fiscal year, there is still room for improvement, if we can do so in a way that does not force us to spend beyond our means.

This is particularly true as we take care of those veterans who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. Finally, this amendment is particularly important for veterans living in rural and geographically isolated areas. For example, the VA's Midwest health care network, which serves South Dakota, is the most rural and covers the largest geographic region of any veterans integrated service network in the Nation. It is therefore one of my highest priorities to ensure that veterans living in rural areas continue to see growth in the VA's ability to reach out to our rural veterans and provide adequate care for them.

For these reasons, I strongly urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

I simply say, as a member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, one of the debates we often have at the committee level is how, on a consistent basis, we have to borrow from the medical facilities account to fund ongoing operations, to fund veterans health care.

What this amendment simply does is, in an offset way, in a paid-for way, force us to make choices. Obviously, the budget process is always about choices, about where we are going to invest, where we are going to put our limited resources. In this era of budgetary constraint, it is important we make choices that are consistent with the priorities I believe we ought to be

addressing in this country, one of which is the importance of our veterans, in making sure we are putting the appropriate funding levels in place not only to provide health care for our veterans but to make sure those facilities out there that are in need of improvement, that are in need of additional dollars for construction or rehabilitation or whatever the case may be, that there are dollars in place that would enable us to meet that very important need.

Again, I ask my colleagues to support this amendment. I believe it does reflect a priority that is important to Members of the Senate, certainly a priority that is important to members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and done in a way that is offset, that is paid for, and more accurately reflects on what we ought to be spending tax dollars.

With that, I ask unanimous consent my amendment be laid aside, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I wish I would have thought of that amendment. It is a great amendment.

The Senator from South Dakota makes the point, we have to make decisions about priorities. When we have an unproven volunteer program that is more expensive than any other volunteer program, and we are putting an extra \$20 million on the basis of emergency versus fulfilling the obligations to those people who have made the ultimate sacrifice and paid the price and served this country and put their lives in danger doing so, it is a no-brainer that we ought to be spending the money on the veterans rather than a program that has not proven to be effective, not proven to match a performance goal, and not proven even to be measuring itself in the 13 years of its existence.

I support the Senator's amendment.

AMENDMENT NO. 3641, DIVISION VIII, WITHDRAWN

With that, I ask the pending amendment be laid aside and amendment No. 3641, division VIII, be called up.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I do not intend on asking for a vote on this amendment, but I highlight this amendment because of the problems implicit in this request.

In this supplemental is a request for \$230 million, an earmark, for three additional Osprey V-22 airplanes. The Pentagon, in 2005, formally approved full rate production of the V-22: 360 for the Marine Corps, 48 for the Navy, and 50 for the Air Force. The Pentagon has ordered 90 as of today.

This plane is not yet proven, one, and I will not go into the debate on that. It cannot even have full testing and cannot be used in the battlefield.

The point is, there is no emergency need to order these planes. This plane is manufactured in Texas and Pennsylvania. The Pentagon did not request

this. The President did not request it. What we have is people requesting it.

We have a plane that has not met performance tests yet, has not been battle proven, and we are adding three airplanes for which some would raise a good question as to whether it ought to be done in this way. It ought to be done through an authorization and through the regular process.

I know this is in the mark. I am not sure the chairman is supportive of it, and I will not ask for the vote, but I don't think this is the way we ought to buy airplanes, especially when it is not an emergency.

There are numerous problems. Most of them have been corrected, but there still have been numerous problems. This is the problem with earmarks. We are adding something that is not authorized, a plane that has had tremendous developmental difficulties, that the Pentagon does not want, the President does not want, yet we want. Why do we want it? Because, for some reason, we end up either employing more people on something that may not eventually work to the military's satisfaction or we get benefits from it in terms of political expediency.

I believe it is the wrong way to go. I ask unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 3641, DIVISION IX, WITHDRAWN

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the pending amendment be set aside and that we proceed to the consideration of amendment No. 3641, division IX.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the division is pending.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this division be withdrawn.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 3641, DIVISION X, WITHDRAWN

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that division X be withdrawn.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 3641, DIVISION XI

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to call up division XI.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I find myself bringing an amendment again against two of my friends who have a significant stake. They are both from Mississippi. They have looked at this issue a great deal.

What I want to do is raise the issues with a debate on the amendment, and then possibly talk about solutions.

During Katrina, the Armed Forces Retirement Home in Gulfport, MS, was damaged. The first floor was damaged significantly. It required and necessitated us moving those veterans to other retirement homes.

We need to remedy that. There are lots of options on the table. I talked